GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
COMMUNICATIONS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2904
ANSWERED ON:03.08.2016
Free Mobiles and Tablets
Godse Shri Hemant Tukaram

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government proposes to provide free mobile phones and tablets to the targeted beneficiaries to bridge the gap of digital divide;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the expenditure involved therein along with the time by which the scheme is likely to be implemented; and

(d) the steps taken/being taken by the Government to spread usage of mobile phones/internet in rural areas?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE (IC) OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS &
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS
(SHRI MANOJ SINHA)
(a) to (d) No, Madam. There is no such proposal to provide free mobile phone and tablets to the targeted beneficiaries. However, the Department has taken several measures for expansion and improvement of telecommunication/internet services in rural and remote areas as given below:

(i) Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for the North-Eastern Region (NER): On 10.09.2014, the Government approved a proposal to implement a Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for the North-Eastern Region (NER). The Project envisages providing mobile coverage to 8621 identified uncovered villages by installation of about 6673 mobile towers, installation of 321 mobile tower sites along National Highways and strengthening of transmission network in the NER. The estimated cost of implementation is Rs. 5336.18 crore. The Project would be funded from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF). The tenders for setting of towers have already been floated.

(ii) Mobile Communication Services in LWE affected areas: 2199 mobile towers are being set up in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected States with a total estimated cost of Rs.3567.58 crore. 2056 mobile towers are operational as on 18.07.2016.

(iii) Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands: Telecom Commission has given 'in principle' approval on 07.11.2014 for Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan including provision of mobile connectivity for Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands with a total estimated investment of Rs. 221.05 crore, which consists of the following components:

(a) Rs 91.16 crores for providing 2G (voice) coverage in uncovered villages.
(b) Rs 9.40 crores for providing seamless 2G (voice) connectivity along NH.
(c) Rs 20 crores for augmentation of OFC Network.
(d) Rs 100.49 crores for augmentation of Satellite system.

(iv) Provision of Mobile Services in Himalayan and Border States:

Work for preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPR) in respect of 4752 uncovered villages in Himalayan States (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) and 2138 villages Border States (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana) has been entrusted to M/s Telecom Consultations India Limited (TCIL).

(v) National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN)/BharatNet: National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) project, renamed as BharatNet, is planned to establish a network infrastructure by connecting all Gram Panchayats (approx. 2.5 lakh) in the country through Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) by using an optimal mix of underground fibre, fibre over power lines, radio and satellite media, for providing broadband connectivity by all categories of service providers on non-discriminatory basis.

The project is planned to be implemented in three phases. Under first phase of the project, 1 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) are to be connected by laying underground OFC by March 2017. Under second phase, connectivity will be provided to remaining 1.5 lakh GPs in the country using an optimal mix of underground fibre, fibre over power lines, radio and satellite media, by December, 2018. A state- of- the-art future-proof network, including fibre between districts and blocks and with for 5G services and Internet of Things era with underground OFC in ring architecture, is planned to be completed by 2023 under third phase.

As on 16.07.2016, Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) has been laid to 54,635 Gram Panchayats (GPs) with a total length of 1,26,853 km. Out of these, 7342 GPs have been provided with broadband connectivity.

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